Through Library Windows

BOOKS THAT ARE NEVER IN.

A VISITOR in one of the great branches of the New York Public Library, struck by the lean and starving appearance of the shelves, inquired of the person in charge where the books were; it seemed to be a library without reading matter. With a triumphant gesture, as if to include the whole civilizing influence of literature, the lady replied, "They're circulating!"

That seemed to her, and was, a satisfactory reply. That a book in the home is worth two on the shelf is a maxim so self-evident as to be hardly worth repeating. It has a corollary—the book which remains on the open shelf when all the others have gone out must give an excuse for being in the library at all.

Nor is this the only sequel to the story. The book that is never in has its own special claim to recognition. It is a frequent cause of unhappiness. The reader who wants it goes out muttering that the library never contains anything you want. But it is a good thing for the book trade, for when a book has demonstrated that it belongs to this special class the bookseller has his opportunity. Most of us, for instance, cannot put at the disposal of our readers more than two or three copies at the most of any one of the half dozen favorite books about Roosevelt. Any good book store should be perfectly safe in counting rather heavily upon this fact in making purchases.

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Tom Sawyer and *Huckleberry Finn* are the classic examples of what I mean by books that are never in. In the young people's room where some timorous souls have in the past tried to discriminate against Tom and his disreputable friend on the ground that something is the matter with their deportment, and in the adult fiction collection these two books and sometimes *The Prince and the Pauper* as well are counted among the books that are always out.

Nowhere else in the long list of specially serviceable authors does the foolishness of the "complete set" so plainly appear as in the case of Mark Twain. Everybody has read *Tom Sawyer*, but I don't know of any one who can lay his hand on his heart and say that he is or ever expects to be, a faithful reader of all that Mark Twain has written.

Neither the public library nor the private owner can possibly have an *equally* urgent need for *all* the books by this great American.

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When we come to the other books of fiction that libraries have perpetual difficulty in supplying, we have a pretty good index of the real affections of American readers. Such a list in the library I am familiar with seems to me distinctly a credit to the discrimination of the reading public. *David Copperfield, Vanity Fair, Silas Marner, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Kidnapped, Treasure Island, The Light That Failed* and *Ramona* are on the list along with such modern companions as Myrtle Reed, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and, of course, our Harold, the flivver of modern fiction. Among the story tellers of yesterday the honored ones include Richard Harding Davis and O. Henry. *The Crisis* is never in and neither is *To Have and to Hold*.

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The affections of childhood are less fickle than those of grown folks when books are concerned. Louisa Alcott's books have never lost their grip. *The Jungle Book* is always out. Miss Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* and Kate Douglas Wiggins's priceless *Rebecca of Sunny Brook Farm*, the Oz stories and the Lang fairy books, the *Little Pepper* series and the *Little Colonel* books have ever new circles of friends.

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Just at present the books that tell how to give Christmas entertainments at home are never in. The demand for these with us is greater than usual at Christmas time, an evidence no doubt of the existence of a certain despised class who haven't been making profits nor forcing somebody to increase their wages, and who therefore are finding it necessary to devise some other way of keeping Christmas than by buying gifts. But neither can we satisfy the demand for Sir Oliver Lodge's book *Raymond*, Maeterlinck's *Life of the Bee*, Katharine Blackford's *Analyzing Character*, Service's poems and Bennett's little essay, published nine years ago, on *How to Live on Twenty-four Hours a Day*.

The demand for the book which Mr. Crothers has wittily christened *Education in Pursuit of Henry Adams* shows no signs of falling off. Miss Addams's *Twenty Years at Hull House* is never in.

No wonder in times like these that Dr. George L. Walton's book, *Why Worry?* goes out as soon as it comes back.

PAUL M. PAINE.

More Kindness to Pinero

THE third volume of Clayton Hamilton's edition of *The Social Plays of Arthur Wing Pinero* has just appeared. It contains *Letty* and *His House in Order*, with a general introduction and critical prefaces to each play.

Mr. Hamilton's aim in editing the important Pinero plays in a dignified edition is an excellent one; such series ought to be undertaken for representative work of a dozen or more modern dramatists. He has edited the plays with great care; his critical prefaces are thorough and enlightening. He admits the tenuity of *His House in Order*—a refreshing change from his idolatrous attitude in some of the comment in the earlier volumes.

THE SOCIAL PLAYS OF ARTHUR WING PINERO. VOL. III. Edited by CLAYTON HAMILTON. E. P. Dutton & Co.

Ed Howe, Composite Yankee

IT must be very agreeable to own a monthly devoted entirely to your own remarks. Still more agreeable when it finds a large and interested public. *Ventures in Common Sense*, by E. W. Howe, are collected from *Howe's Monthly* for the Free Lance Series, with an introduction by H. L. Mencken. The introduction, by the way, is not the least interesting part of the book, for it shows Mr. Mencken in a role he seldom plays, roaring you as gently as any sucking dove.

In these "aphorisms and arguments" Mr. Howe ranges over a wide field without ploughing deeply into it at any point, a characteristic which stamps him as a peculiarly American philosopher. There are thirty-two subjects of comment: *Women* are at the head of the list, for American men are known everywhere for their unfailing slogan, "Ladies first." Yet some of this politeness in precedence might be sacrificed for a less grimly contemptuous note. There is neither old fashioned courtesy nor new fashioned nonchalant camaraderie in his attitude. Still, as he himself says at the close of that section, "Finally I am sorry I brought up the subject. I know nothing about it."

He leaves it behind with an air of relief to touch at varying length, but with some monotony of style, upon *Literature, The Poor, Conduct, Fools, Friendship*, sociology, anything and everything. The pithy paragraphs lie open to the suspicion that their author is often fitting the truth to the epigram rather than the epigram to the truth. Yet in general there is a vibrant, even vociferous honesty, without any of the usual self-deception that drapes so gracefully the philosopher in public. Gradually, out of these keen, crude, earnest sayings, there emerges the composite American—American, first of all, because he is so defiantly provincial.

The term is not necessarily a reproach. It states a fact. The charm and subtle flavor of wide experience do not touch his spirit. His limitations in æsthetic and cultural standards would be irritating if they were not a trifle tragic. In religious matters he is an agnostic, though he says with great definiteness, "I know." One feels that he is so very capable and shrewd and untouched by imagination that he is efficiently free of the need of God. He respects man, and that is good. Yet it is the respect of the trader for a fellow trader who may get the better of him. He sees very distinctly, yet short sightedly. The poets whom he so despises have the truer vision.

But this sturdy, genuine, homely philosopher is a plain man in a plain world and anxious to have every one know how very plain it is. His prototype was the Yankee farmer chewing tobacco while he astutely criticised the great of the nation in the forum of the crossroads "gen'ral store."

One could quote freely from this odd mixture of shrewdness, cheap scepticism, vigorous optimism, this honest, matter of fact, unimaginative man. His being is woven out of the many colored fibres of American life.

All the same one "would rather see than be one."

M. P. A.

VENTURES IN COMMON SENSE. By E. W. HOWE. Alfred A. Knopf.

IN William Webster Ellsworth's *A Golden Age of Authors*, is a memory of Hopkinson Smith's appearance as a German emperor at a Twelfth Night revel of the Century Club, held years before the war. Kaiser Hopkinzollern wore a brass helmet and a snow white uniform and his moustaches were turned up. He went around with a box of decorations, "pinning one on nearly every breast. Later in the evening he was called upon for a speech and he delivered one that was prophetic. 'I am a man of peace,' he said. 'I vant a piece of Morocco; I vant a piece of China; I vant a piece of of efery country I have not the whole of alretty.'"